

ARTICLE APPEARED
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WASHINGTON POST
28 JANUARY 1983

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Incident Fails To Harm Career Of Air Attache

Locked in the Defense Intelligence Agency's files is a strange case of military justice. It involves a high-ranking DIA official in West Germany who confessed to misappropriating government funds.

Yet he was promoted, while officers who knew of his misconduct are no longer on the scene.

My associate Donald Goldberg has seen investigative files and DIA cables. He has interviewed Pentagon officials and talked with sources at the U.S. Embassy in Bonn. Here's the story:

Air Force Col. Ronald Lord was first suspected three years ago of having misused several hundred dollars of DIA funds. He was stationed in Bonn as the DIA's air attaché for West Germany.

Lord's commanding officer, Col. Jack Calloway, called in the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

According to DIA cables, Lord confessed that he had taken the money, and he made restitution.

Calloway sent this message to Washington: "I see a fairly consistent

pattern of decisions made by Col. Lord, all of which revealed bad judgment and some of which would seem to indicate that deliberate deception was involved . . . I request that Col. Lord be removed from [the embassy] at least, and that consideration be given to removing him from the attache system."

There were two reasons for wanting Lord out of Bonn. The first involved his subordinates in the embassy. As Calloway explained in a cable to the Pentagon: "The enlisted personnel in the office will not respond well to Col. Lord if he is found guilty and remains on station . . . They will not be disobedient or insolent, but they will suffer a drop in morale, motivation and efficiency."

The second reason involved U.S.-German relations. As another DIA official reported to Washington: "Knowledge of Col. Lord's involvement in these indiscretions stretches far beyond the walls of the Defense Attache Office, to include influential members of the U.S. Embassy community, the foreign attache corps and the German Ministry of Defense."

Indeed, sources said a high-ranking German official spoke to Calloway about the incident at a diplomatic function. Speaking quietly in German, the official told Calloway he knew the Americans had a problem on their hands, and that he was

confident they would take care of it. He implied that such a situation would not be tolerated by the West German military.

But the DIA handled the situation by leaving Lord at the embassy. Recently he was promoted to a post at the Allied Forces Central Europe headquarters in Brunsum, The Netherlands. His only punishment was a written reprimand in his personnel file.

Meanwhile, Calloway, his disciplinary recommendations ignored, hurried his already-scheduled retirement. One of his subordinates also took retirement ahead of schedule, while another was transferred back to the United States.

Footnote: Lord refused to comment when approached.

White House Pipeline: Fred F. Fielding's diverse duties as counsel to the president keep him pretty well chained to his desk while other members of the White House staff are gallivanting off to faraway places with the boss.

But as consolation—or maybe to rub it in—his peripatetic colleagues bring him exotic headgear as mementos of the occasions he has missed.

Among the stay-at-home's souvenirs are a blue-and-white baseball cap from the president's trip to New Orleans and a black-and-gold NASA cap from the last space-shuttle launch.